

REMARKS BY REP. LUIS V. GUTIERREZ
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEBRUARY 16, 2011

I rise today to bring the urgent attention of the U.S House of Representatives to a human rights and civil rights crisis.

I want to talk to you today about a part of the world where the right of citizens of all walks of life to protest and speak their minds is being denied with clubs and pepper spray.

A part of the world where a student strike led the university to ban student protests on campus and where students protesting the crackdown on free speech were violently attacked by heavily armed police.

A place where a newspaper editorial stated “the indiscriminate aggression of police riot squads against students, who are exercising their constitutional rights in public areas without interfering with any academic or administrative activity, is a gross violation of their rights and an act comparable only to the acts of the dictatorships we all denounce and reject.”

A place where the same government has closed public access to some legislative sessions.

I ask this Congress to look at a part of the world where the bar association has been dismantled by the legislature because it takes stands in opposition to the government and its leader has been jailed for fighting a politically-motivated lawsuit.

And where is this part of the world?

Egypt?

No. Protesters, exercising freedom of speech, brought down a dictator in Cairo.

What far-away land has seen student protest banned, union protesters beaten and free speech advocates jailed?

The United States of America's colony of Puerto Rico.

Sound outrageous?

It is. But true, and well-documented.

I ask my colleagues in U.S. House of Representatives to turn their eyes to Puerto Rico.

The doors to the U.S. Congress are open. Our proceedings are public – in fact, the public is our boss.

That's how it works in a democracy.

Across America today, I am sure, there were or will be protests at college campuses.

Across America, workers will go on strike. And there will be marches and protests against a mayor or governor and derogatory things may be said about President Obama.

In Madison, Wisconsin -- as we speak -- protests over employment policies and budget cuts at the University of Wisconsin are taking place. College and even high school students have been joined by unions and other allies in peaceful protest.

Will we see pepper spray and beatings? Not likely. The protesters are protected by our First Amendment.

And that's the way it works in a democracy.

It is their right to say whatever they want, and say it without fear of pepper spray or clubs or a legislature that limits and restricts the peoples' rights.

In the fifty States, we have lots of organizations, not unlike the Puerto Rico Bar Association, an organization under attack by the Puerto Rican government. And we don't tolerate leaders being sent to jail because they exercise their rights and they stand up for what they believe in.

But that's the reality in Puerto Rico.

Just last week -- Judge Fuste, a federal judge with close political ties to the ruling party and a personal history of opposing the Puerto Rico bar association -- a federal judge whose salary is paid for by American taxpayers -- ordered Osvaldo Toledo, the President of the Puerto Rico Bar Association, to jail.

What was Osvaldo Toledo's crime? Educating his members about how to opt out of a politically motivated lawsuit designed to destroy the organization.

For me, this attack was the final straw and brought me to the floor to speak out.

So in solidarity with Osvaldo Toledo, jailed for doing his job as the leader of the Puerto Rico Bar Association – I will enter into the Congressional record today the instructions for his members on how to opt out of the class action suit that is threatening their organization.

I will say to those who would pass laws to stifle public protest, to those who would authorize use of force against peaceful protesters and try to stifle the words and actions of their enemies:

Attacking free speech doesn't work in a democracy.

Here is a fact that most of us learned long ago. Here is a lesson the people of Egypt taught the world last week:

Brutal laws and secret meetings and armed enforcers don't extinguish the flame of justice – they are the spark that makes it burn brighter.

You may, with your armed guards and your restrictive laws try to slow down protests of the people. You may harass the Puerto Rico Bar Association and make their life uncomfortable for a while. But every time you turn police on students, and jail an opponent, you guarantee that the good people of Puerto Rico and this Congress will speak out for justice.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the people of Puerto Rico that there are some places that this crusade to end free speech cannot reach. Not today. Not ever. I stand with you.

Mr. Speaker, I will return to this well to speak on this important matter again and particularly on the federal judge at the heart of this matter.

I yield the balance of my time.

Background

 [Puerto Rico Daily Sun - Editorial, Feb. 10, 2011](#)

 [Opt Out Letter](#)

 [Opt Out Instructions](#)